

**GULF OF MEXICO ALLIANCE
REGIONAL RESTORATION COORDINATION TEAM (RRCT)
STATE-LED “ROUND ROBIN” WORKSHOP NOTES**

DAPHNE, ALABAMA
MARCH 6-9, 2007

March 6, Day 1: Carl Ferraro welcomed the RRCT to the meeting and to the Five Rivers Center Alabama complex. Hank Burch, the Site Manager for the Resource Center also provided welcoming remarks and provided a brief history of the Resource Center.

Mr. Ferraro said that the purpose of the meeting is to exchange information and ideas among the States in the Gulf of Mexico on restoration issues. These meetings are an opportunity to learn from other team members and local experts and discover what has worked well and what has not. The team must also move forward on implementation of the Governors Action Plan. The RRCT should promote policies and actions which will reverse habitat loss so that our children can inherit a better Gulf Coast.

The morning covered a number of speakers discussing the Coastal Alabama Geology, Habitat Status and Trends, and Storm Impacts. All presentations will be posted on the Gulf of Mexico Alliance Working Website. The URL for that website is:
<http://www2.nos.noaa.gov/gomex/restoration/welcome.html>.

Dr. Doug Haywick, University of South Alabama discussed the geology of coastal Alabama.

Dr. Barry A. Vittor, Vittor & Associates, Inc., spoke on wetlands and SAV status and trends in coastal Alabama. He said that the Coastal Program is working with NEP to do new mapping in 2007. It is costly and time consuming to do wetlands mapping. It took seven years to get that funded and everything contracted. They are also working on a new status and trends report.

Mark Vanhoose with the Marine Resources Division (MRD) of the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources gave a presentation on status and trends of oyster reefs in coastal Alabama.

Dr. John Dindo with the Dauphin Island Sea Lab spoke on the effect of hurricanes Ivan and Katrina on colonial water bird nesting sites in coastal Alabama. One of the questions still to be answered is where the birds have gone since their habitat was destroyed by the hurricanes. Dr. Dindo also discussed mitigation issues involved with riparian rights on oyster leases.

Carl Ferraro with the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, State Lands Division, gave a presentation on Alabama's post-Katrina fish and shellfish nursery habitat restoration program. They are targeting the Mississippi Sound and its long-term erosion problem. That erosion problem was exacerbated by Hurricane Katrina. He described the proposed sites for the restoration project and the criteria to be used in

selection. They are considering several different restoration techniques, and he explained some of the advantages and disadvantages of those techniques. The next steps include meeting with other natural resource agencies, NGO's, project designers, etc., to discuss project sites being considered and to work on the regulatory process. They have \$8 million to work with. They hope to issue an RFP for construction some time in late summer after the engineering and environmental work has been completed, and then start building the marsh. The funds need to be leveraged against other funding programs such as CIAP.

James Buckalew with the Corps of Engineers, Mobile District, spoke on the USACE Section 204/206 experience in coastal Alabama. He said that there are no Section 206 programs in Alabama. The Section 204 continuing authority program allows the Corps to find beneficial uses for dredged material produced by Corps projects. The program requires a non-Federal component. He described three projects being considered in Alabama: Helen Wood Park, the Dauphin Island Parkway, and the Isle of Herbes. That project covers habitat restoration & creation of around 10 acres on an island of about 420 acres.

One question that arose in the above discussion was what role increased ship traffic and the size of ships has had in increasing erosion. That might be an information need for the Regional Restoration Coordination Team to look into.

During lunch, **Roberta Swann**, Mobile Bay National Estuary Program, provided a presentation and demonstration on the AL-MS Restoration Database. She said that the creation of the database was funded by Sea Grant. It captures information about habitat projects planned or completed. NERI and EPA databases were reviewed in developing this one. To use it requires a person to sign up and create a password. There are over 56 agency categories. Some of the capabilities include mapping the projects and uploading photographs. The success of the database is measured by how much it is used.

One of the issues for the RRCT is to figure out what database system will work and how to keep the database current. It was pointed out that NERI meets all of the inter-agency standards. The developers consider the AL-MS Restoration Database to have a less onerous data-entry process and to be more accessible to the public compared to the NERI or EPA databases. PHINS is working with this database group, and considering the possibility of linking the data with PHINS.

Will Brantley, Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, State Lands Division, spoke on the preservation accomplishments of Alabama's Forever Wild Program. He described several projects, including the Baldwin County Wetland Survey, the Grand Bay Savanna, the Lillian Swamp, Splinter Hill Bog, and Perdido River. They also do management of exotic species. All of the tracts they acquire are multiple-use such as fishing, hunting, canoe trails, etc. He pointed out that the program has a sunset clause in five years.

Joe Jernigan with the Alabama Department of Coastal and Natural Resources spoke on selective use of herbicides in Chocolatta Bay. They are looking to see if native plants will come back after herbicide use and also how the fish population was after such use.

Randy Roach with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, spoke on USFWS restoration efforts in coastal Alabama.

Barry P. Vittor, Vittor and Associates, Inc., spoke on the Alabama Coastal Foundation's Mon Louis Island restoration project.

Dr. Ken Heck with the Dauphin Island Sea Lab spoke on the City of Orange Beach's Robinson Island restoration and protection project. He pointed out that it was one of the Coastal Restoration Program (CRP) projects with the Gulf of Mexico Foundation.

During the wrap-up session, a question was raised about how we evaluate the benefits of USACE projects. For example, projects with breakwaters and birding marsh indicate direct benefits, but what about the preventative aspect—can credit be given to a project for providing protection? Also, in coastal uplands protection is something they are starting to look at compared to wetlands restoration. Randy Runnells said this is starting to be a topic for discussion in Florida. There do not appear to be many programs that consider buying uplands for to prevent loss. Miles Croom said the RRCT should be focusing on conservation as well as restoration. The team should look at how it can develop and promote recommendations on ways to conserve these areas. Perhaps the team should be looking at the issue of buying coastal lands for conservation and other prevention measures in order to develop recommendations. Such considerations create recommendations that would be opposed by advocates for private property rights. When the team talks about restoration priorities, it should be made clear that restoration comes second to preserving habitats in the first place. The RRCT needs to find regulatory means to do this.

Quenton Dokken said there is another working group of the GOM Alliance that is composed of lawyers who are working on these types of regulatory issues. Perhaps the RRCT could have them come to the Galveston meeting and discuss such regulatory issues.

March 7, Day 2: Mississippi Section. **Robert Seyfarth**, Mississippi Department of Environmental Quality, welcomed the team to day 2, which highlighted restoration issues in the state of Mississippi. **Mr. Hank Burch** with the Five Rivers Center welcomed participants to the center and provided a brief history of the area.

Chris May, Grand Bay NERR, spoke on distribution, status, and trends of sea grasses in Mississippi. He discussed losses in sea grasses over the last 40 years, focusing on the Grand Bay NERR. Restoration costs run about \$15,000 per acre. The biggest cost for the losses is nutrient loading in the coastal environments. He said they have just started looking at land use trends and population growth. NOAA's Coastal Services Center has

been compiling data looking at the change in acres from 2001-2006, and that analysis has just been completed and is available.

Scott Gordon with the MS Department of Marine Resources, Shellfish Bureau, gave a presentation on Mississippi oysters, storm impacts, and restoration. He showed a slide indicating the eyes of 28 storms passing within 65 nautical miles of Long Beach, MS during the last 150 years. He indicated that prior to Hurricane Katrina, Mississippi had 12,000 acres of protective reef habitat, and that preliminary mortality estimates for harvestable oysters were in excess of 90%.

Mike Pursley with the Mississippi Department of Marine Resources spoke on management of invasive aquatic plant species in coastal Mississippi.

Phil Bass with the EPA Gulf of Mexico Program provided an update on the Gulf of Mexico Alliance. The U. S. Oceans Commission Report on the Oceans indicated that the oceans and the Gulf of Mexico needed environmental attention. President Bush responded with the Ocean Action Plan. Governor Bush of Florida brought the other Gulf States Governors together to develop a plan to look at the Gulf of Mexico resources and needs with an eye toward the possibility of bringing some national resources to the Gulf. It was suggested that the Gulf States form a coalition to respond to the President's Ocean Action Plan. The Alliance was set up for the Governors of those States to take the lead. Five topics were selected and each State took the lead on one of the topics. Those topics are:

- Improvement in Gulf water quality, with an emphasis on healthy beaches and shellfish beds;
- Restoration and conservation of coastal wetlands;
- Environmental education;
- Identification and characterization of Gulf habitats to inform management decisions; and
- Reductions in nutrient loading.

The Alliance is one year into the 36-month plan. EPA and NOAA are the federal work group co-leads and are putting their resources into the effort. The Priority Issue Teams need to be looking at the big picture—10-20 years from now in each of the States. The GOM Alliance can speak as one voice before Congress and present the resource needs of the Gulf of Mexico. To make this work properly, the State-level effort has to start at the top. Now that Governor Bush is no longer Governor of Florida, Governor Barbour has been requested to take over the leadership role, and he has indicated that he is willing to do so. Bill Walker with MDEQ and Dr. Bass have visited Florida and Louisiana and hope to visit Alabama and Texas very soon to encourage continued support of the Governors' offices for the GOM Alliance.

In May or early June, hopefully, Governor Barbour will invite the Federal leadership and the other four Governors to Mississippi to focus on the Alliance. Following that meeting, the next phase of the Governors' Action Plan will begin. The RRCT needs to be thinking

about what it needs that the Alliance Management Team can help with. While the Nation is focused on the northern Gulf, this is a time to act. He said that the 36-month plan of the Alliance is not an end, but a beginning.

The RRCT members said that they need feedback from the overall Alliance State Leads as to what they are doing. The team needs more communication between the Leads of the States and the representatives working on the RRCT. The team also needs a framework for its work. Also, Randy Runnells asked about the broader action plans that were developed originally and then dropped after Hurricane Katrina. The team needs to look at long-term opportunities.

Mr. Bass urged that the RRCT talk up what is being done through the GOM Alliance. Team members need to make sure that word moves up the food chain. Len Bahr asked if the other groups are doing similar efforts as the RRCT. Phil Bass said he thought so. He also reported that the AMT is considering combining the Nutrients working group with the Water Quality group. Habitat restoration plays into the nutrient issue as well.

Dr. Susan Rees with the Corps of Engineers, Mobile District, spoke on the Mississippi Coastal Improvements Program. She said that projects are usually required to have national economic development benefits and an incremental cost-benefit analysis. They are required to coordinate their activities with similar activities going on in Louisiana. The Louisiana Coastal Protection and Restoration Project team is looking in to building levees.

Dr. Rees said that in the Franklin Creek Floodway, they are looking at buying out homeowners' property in order to be able to make the necessary improvements. The Corps has a relocation policy that is very attractive to families that may be in those affected areas. The Flood Control and Coastal Energy Act allows for 100 percent Federal funding of federally constructed projects. Funds are available to restore 35 miles of beach and dune systems. The comprehensive program is looking at a coast-wide storm damage reduction system, fresh-water development of the Biloxi marshes and Grand Bay Savannah, coastal wetland and forest restoration, and submerged aquatic vegetation and oyster reef restoration.

Looking at the damage caused by Hurricane Katrina and how it fits in the total storm suite, Katrina and Camille are extreme examples. Basically, they are doing systematic analyses using 36 possible storms. They are analyzing 136 storms coming into the Mississippi area along five different tracks. They are also doing modeling with FEMA, and are developing a risk-managed design framework. All of these studies and analyses being conducted will be provided to decision makers so they will understand that it is not always possible to predict what will happen in the future. That will all be part of a risk analysis.

Dr. Rees said that the COE will use an aggressive information process to make sure that inhabitants in the possible affected area will know the probabilities of flooding in major

occurrences. The Federal Government cannot force people to not be in a particular area, but we can tell them the risks involved.

Dr. Rees said right now the Corps' levee certification program is being revamped. Also the National Flood Insurance Program may have some changes made. There will be significant economic disadvantages against coastal development.

Dr. Rees' presentation will be available on the RRCT working website and at www.sam.usace.army.mil. The Corps is assuming that the coast will build back to pre-Katrina levels. Coastal Mississippi prior to Katrina was in a moderate growth phase.

During lunch, **George Ramseur** with MDMR gave a presentation entitled, "Back to the Future in the Mississippi Coastal Preserves."

Cristina Watters, Grand Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve (NERR) made a presentation on research-based stewardship and restoration. She referred to the Centralized Data Management Office that was established to support the nationwide reserve systems. The website address is: <http://cdmo.baruch.sc.edu>. Ms. Watters said that NERR's do not own the property—it is made up of lands owned by other entities such as the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Jenny Jacobsen, Mobile District, USACE, spoke on a "Long-term Comprehensive Master Plan for Beneficial Uses along Coastal Mississippi."

Following her presentation, the possibility of policy change regarding the "least cost alternative" requirement under the COE's beneficial use regulation was discussed. The team is interested in an analysis that gives greater consideration to the environmental benefit rather than least cost alternative. Randy Runnels indicated that FDEP had contracted to do a fish habitat survey. They have generated a report and now when conflicts arise regarding beneficial uses, they have the information readily at hand and can identify fishing holes, for example.

Ali Leggett with MDMR spoke on MDMR's role in the Deer Island tidal marsh restoration.

Jenny Jacobsen, Mobile District, USACE, made a presentation on the comprehensive effort involved in the Deer Island restoration project, MS.

The day concluded with final, overall discussion. There was a discussion on the use of geo-textile tubes. There are a lot of concerns expressed from engineers about geo-textile tubes. There is a project near Pensacola where COE is creating an aquatic berm where they used the geo-textile tubes. In high-energy situations, geo-textile tubes are not really that stable, and hardened structures work better. Geo-textile tubes are cheaper than hardened structures. Filling geo-textile tubes requires material with very specific characteristics. Texas has used them in a number of different ways. Geo-textile tubes are considered temporary measures.

Kris Benson referred to some of the products available through the Coastal Services Center. One is the Legislative Atlas that provides a look at the different laws affecting coastal resource management and the regulatory framework in the various Gulf States.

Tom Calnan referred to the CIAP program. Now the big picture is being looked at. All the states except Florida will have to figure out how to spend the CIAP money. Texas does not have a plan on how to spend that money. The RRCT should be thinking long-term for how we use the CIAP money. Louisiana and Mississippi are already thinking long-term. GOMESA, GOM Energy Security Act, was discussed. Louisiana passed legislation that determining that the state will use the money for coastal restoration rather than for roads or other infrastructure, etc. There are some long-term activities on-going in Louisiana. Lake Ponchartrain Basin Foundation has put together a map of what the lakes will look like 50 years from now, for example. Either the RRCT or the Habitat ID PIT needs to pull some of that information together. Quenton Dokken said that the RRCT needs to pull together what TNC and others have done so that the team can get to the point of establishing its vision and developing a plan.

Dr. Dokken described a critical question for the team to answer as “What makes the most sense to restore to?” The team must look at habitat status and trajectories and work from those reference points. Dr. Dokken said the team must recognize and communicate that these systems are dynamic natural systems, so locking them into place is not going to work. Raphael Calderon said the team should decide what we want to keep. The RRCT should to bring those areas together and work from there. A great deal of data supporting these questions already exists. The original intent of the RRCT was to think about the big picture. The round-robin workshops each looks at the smaller picture in each State, and at the end the team will need to pull all that together to come up with the big picture vision.

Perhaps the team needs to consider whether it is asking the right questions and understanding the dynamics of the coast to make realistic suggestions. The team’s recommendations need to work with nature and not oppose it.

Lynn Martin said there has been a lot of talk about finding funding for long-term work. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service State Wildlife Grants Program is one possibility. In Texas, the funds have not been used for coastal restoration work. If the States included coastal work in their action plans for use of those funds, the opportunity is there. The Alliance could also develop a coastal plan for the Gulf Coast that could be part of the SARP (Southwest Aquatic Resource Program) Habitat Plan. SARP has a draft plan so the RRCT needs to make sure that SARP is talking with Alliance & RRCT representatives. Miles Croom can provide Quenton Dokken with contacts for that group. He said there will be a meeting of that group in Charleston April 10 - 12.

Robert Seyfarth said the States are going to want SARP and there should be some influence from the Alliance PITs to develop regional priorities.

March 8—Implementing the Governors’ Action Plan

Quenton Dokken served as facilitator. He congratulated Alabama and Mississippi for two days of interesting speakers and indicated the team's appreciation for the efforts of the hosts.

Dr. Dokken said the Governor's Action Plan describes a set of objectives. The RRCT is focused on actions under objectives R-1 and R-2. Dr. Dokken referred to what Susan Rees, USACE, said in her earlier presentation regarding sea level rise. That sort of in-depth analysis is not being done for all five of the Gulf States. The USACE would have to be directed by Congress and provided funding to do a similar analysis for the other States. The RRCT should recommend that the Gulf States' congressional delegations focus on that.

Dr. Dokken reviewed the action blueprint for the restoration team. The team has been hosting meetings in each of the States to get information on habitat restoration—what already has been done, lessons learned, goals and barriers.

R1-3—The team has chosen not to work on that to date, and the State of Texas has been funded to host a workshop to study freshwater inflow issues.

R1-4—The team has not adequately dealt with this issue. There is a lot of information in the public workshop minutes, but in order to develop the policy recommendations that the team is tasked with developing, more feedback from the state representatives is needed.. What are the environmental issues that affect habitat conservation issues? The States will have to help us out there.

R1-5—The team will be looking at information from the meetings that have already been held, but again, additional information is needed from the States.

R1-6—The team needs more input from the States to determine the best course of action.

R1-7—Dr. Dokken indicated that the EPA Gulf of Mexico Program, the Gulf of Mexico Foundation, and many others are working on this action. The GOMF is trying to pull together a \$1 million fund to help with restoration Gulf-wide.

R1-8—The RRCT will participate in a Regional Sediment Master Plan workshop at the conclusion of the state-led portion of this workshop.

R1-9—Information is available through NOAA.

Dr. Dokken referred to the matrix. It relates to progress on the action items in the Governors Action Plan.

Kris Benson said that the team needs to update the implementation activities matrix. Are the leads for each action still applicable? Are the people who committed to contributing to each of the actions in fact doing what they said they would do? Are actions being captured in the latest update, of Feb. 23, 2007?

It was pointed out that for action R1 the matrix should include Mexico as a contributor. Dr. Dokken said that at the Texas meeting several Mexican representatives will be present to present ongoing restoration and conservation activities on the Gulf coast of Mexico. Organizations like Pronatura (an equivalent of the Nature Conservancy here), Fondo Conservation (which works mainly on the west coast and is interested in working on Gulf issues as well), and universities and agencies in Mexico will be represented. GMF is looking at ways to collaborate to take an ecosystem approach, and the RRCT must consider this input.

Kris Benson said he has several email lists, one for State Restoration Team members, a Federal members list, and an NGO list. He will include the Mexican representatives on the matrix.

Woody Woodrow discussed the State leadership. What can the RRCT do to get State Leads (the AMT) to participate more fully? Perhaps the State Representatives to the RRCT could suggest a conference call that the State Leads would be invited to participate in as a means of getting them more involved. The State Leads need to provide support for the team's efforts. Probably LA DNR should be included. Phil Bass said Karen Gautreaux has promised to identify the right person at DNR to participate. The issue of State enthusiasm for supporting these efforts is one of the reasons that the Alliance is focused on having a leadership meeting starting at the Governors' level of the Gulf States. Dr. Dokken said he would communicate with Karen Gautreaux and Greg DuCote to make sure that the team has LA representation at the next round-robin workshop.

Phil Bass said if the State agencies that have newsletters would begin putting articles in those newsletters about what the Alliance is doing, it would help move the RRCT's efforts forward. Lee Yokel, in her role as coordinator for the Education/Outreach group, could help with this.

Under R1-2 under the Contributor section, all state representatives should be included. Under Collaborators, changes should be made to capture all team members.

An action item is to include all of the States and Mexico as contributors and collaborators. After this initial round-robin of State-led meetings, there should be some kind of plan or arrangement to continue working together. The RRCT needs to formulate a framework for continuation. That should go in the Key Next Steps component for this action. The action should also include some language about information exchange among the States.

The next two meetings among the states should also be added:

Texas meeting will be May 22-24 in Galveston, Texas.

St. Petersburg, FL

Item R1-3--Woody Woodrow gave an update on the Texas contract with EPA-GMP for hosting a workshop on freshwater inflows. They are in the process of finalizing the agreement. The point person is Robin Reichers and they have a conference committee within Texas Parks and Wildlife. The initial meeting will take place shortly, and they will start getting speakers lined up for the conference on fresh water inflows. They are interested in some international participation because other countries have had some major fresh water inflow issues. This is a big issue in Texas. It is also a big issue in Florida. All of the States need to be looking at the person in their State to participate in this effort. One question in Texas is how to maintain fresh water inflows into estuaries. Heidi Recksiek said the issue of freshwater inflows comes up in all of the Gulf States. Water supplies will also come into play. There are some significant issues and user conflicts raised by this topic. Woody Woodrow will discuss this further with Ms. Recksiek. Issues such as sediment, nutrients, wastewater issues, and issues like putting reclaimed water back into the agricultural systems will all be included. The conference will take place in the next 12-18 months.

Randy Runnels asked if the RRCT should talk about what sort of tentative goals should come out of that workshop. On the State Reps. conference call, the team could discuss this. Woody Woodrow will let Kris Benson know if we need to dedicate a call to that specific issue. Mr. Woodrow said the RRCT needs to play some role in determining the goals of that workshop. The States may want to set up a separate committee of people who are more familiar with the topic.

Drew Puffer said that 8-10 years ago, NOAA did a series of workshops on freshwater inflows. John Kline went around the Gulf seeking freshwater inflow issues and relating the issues to the biology of the region. There may be some good data that that could be captured from that work. Heidi Reidsick will see if that information can be tracked down.

Under R1-3, USGS should be moved to the Collaborator column and Texas should be included as the lead. Contributors are EPA and Florida. The Texas Water Development Board is interested in supporting the conference, river authorities and other groups may also be interested in supporting the conference. Contributions from other States would be very welcome. The RRCT needs for the State Leads (AMT) to smooth the way for out-of-state travel for these meetings.

R1-4—in previous discussions, the team has failed to capture a lot of what developed in the white paper and the comments from the earlier workshops and conference calls. Inconsistent application of existing regulations across the Gulf, for example. This involves the regulatory issues that can affect restoration efforts. Randy Runnels said it is sometimes difficult to get delegation of authority to enforce the regulation. In Florida, delegations of authority are a big issue. Dr. Dokken said that these are issues that NGO's should be involved in. Many times NGO's can get these issues into the public eye. Woody Woodrow said in Texas there have been problems with a nationwide program that grants permits for environmental restoration projects. A nationwide permit can be used for purported restoration projects by people other than the State, and the State does

not have an opportunity to comment on these projects. The question was asked if there is an opportunity to put in additional conditions into these nationwide regulations. Larry Parson said that 401 certification can say that the State needs to be part of the review process. There is also an opportunity to have regional conditions put into the nationwide regulation. Some of these issues will probably get resolved in that process. Every State has a love-hate relationship with the nationwide permit system.

Dr. Dokken said these are the type of issues the action plan has asked the RRCT to address. This discussion needs to go in the report and the team needs to come up with recommendations. The certification for the nationwide will come out before our report is out. The State representatives need to flesh this out.

Randy Runnels mentioned concerns about NEPA involving Corps projects. Each of the Federal agencies is responsible for doing its own NEPA. Mr. Runnels said it seems like it is not triggering an EIS when an EA has been done. If the overall goal is to do things for the environment, what sort of guidelines are needed so that the agencies do not go down the wrong path? There are checks and balances to catch some of these problems. It would be useful to have discussions illuminating the differences between the federal process and the non-federal process. The process for permitting projects by private individuals is different than for federally sponsored projects. In some states, inter-agency coordination teams participate in the permitting processes. Team review of federal projects is usually only done for major projects with regional importance.

In Texas, every two weeks private individuals come in and present their projects to all the agencies and the resource agencies provide advice. A watershed-wide interagency approach is used. For really large projects in Texas, there is an ICT process that is used. Dr. Dokken asked if, when the states begin to evaluate projects, there is some type of overview document that shows the priorities of needs and goals for the State for conservation and/or for restoration projects. Depending on the type of project, there are different processes that are used. In any case, individual permits are required, and all the agencies are involved in review. In interagency team efforts, early on the goals and the problems are discussed. There can be a lot of cooperation and collaboration on such projects. Sometimes projects get started in Texas where that kind of process has not been used, and then there may be some problems.

The solutions for four and five would be better communication among agencies. Perhaps the recommendation to come out would be to use some formal structure for interagency cooperation in the permitting process. It was pointed out that it is part of the solution, but not the entire solution.

Dr. Dokken said there seemed to be room for conflict in the permitting process if the Corps gave the permit in the states where resource agency personnel do not think there is adequate review, and applicants can choose the process they want to achieve their goals. Sometimes the process is streamlined too much for restoration projects. Better inter-agency coordination is the way to go rather than trying to streamline things too much.

The team felt that this was an issue that could benefit from spending a day on the issue. Actions 4, 5, and 6 would benefit from additional discussions about how each State works, identification of problems and processes that do not work well. The team would then develop a list of issues and potential solutions. Following that, the next step might be to meet with the Corps Districts to talk about those issues.

For nationwide permits for restoration projects, it was felt that the team should promote regional conditions. The nationwide is out for public comment right now. Once it is issued, it is good for five years. The question was asked if the States are involved in getting comments into the nationwide document. The draft permits are coming out this week, and then regional conditions will come out and it will go for public comment. Should the team focus on this at the Texas meeting with five States and the five different USACE regulatory programs? That is a one- to two-day or more discussion independent of the restoration issues. That would not be good to do at the Texas workshop. Perhaps the team needs a policy working group. Dr. Dokken said Rich McLaughlin may be at the Texas and/or Florida meeting and could be helpful on this very complex issue. The Association of State Wetland Managers will be meeting at the end of this month in Virginia to talk about a lot of the same issues. If the Alliance or the RRCT spends a lot of time on that all the team will be doing is trying to keep up with a moving target.

Item 5 is talking about streamlining, so it is a little different. The states need to write their individual comments on the nationwide regulation. It was stated that the regulatory process is so political that it is not something the Alliance can significantly change or resolve. The RRCT can describe problems in the process and make some policy recommendations. With regard to Item 5, Randy Runnells reiterated that caution should be applied in discussing streamlining attempts. The status update in the matrix captures this concern. Robert Seyfarth said with regard to the beneficial use plan, sometimes there are conflicts among the Federal agencies in trying to streamline the regulations.

Woody Woodrow said in Texas in streamlining for restoration, he does not know that there have been any regulations that have inhibited the process. It is just a process to go through to deal with the EFH, ESA, historic resource, and other issues. Conservation first is always considered. Randy Runnells said that streamlining is not a high priority for Florida. Mr. Woodrow said he does not know of a restoration project that does no harm. Project proponents hope to implement projects in a balanced manner that is beneficial overall. EFH and other issues in Texas have not prevented project implementation. In the original white paper, the streamlining topic did not have a strong emphasis. Better coordination is recommended in Action No. 4, and would also benefit Action No. 5. Use of project teams at the early stages of project development would be the best way to streamline projects, rather than relaxing the regulatory process. For private applications in particular, the team should not recommend streamlining the process. There needs to be oversight of regulatory permitting of applicants. This seems to have been captured in the matrix status column.

It was pointed out that staffing is an issue to be able to have time to spend on individual projects. State agency personnel try to find out a little bit about each proposed project,

but they can't do actual oversight. Lynn Martin suggested that the team change the part in the matrix that says the States will hold meetings to talk about streamlining. That does not appear to be necessary. Carl Ferraro said on one of the conference calls, the State Leads can work on rewording No. 5.

Action # 6: A major issue appears to be inconsistency among reporting requirements for Federal grants. That can create an administrative burden. Is there is a reason why Federal granting processes cannot be made in parallel? Mr. Woodrow said if wetland restoration is the goal of a particular grant, it would be good to have some coordination at the Federal level to get common reporting requirements. It was pointed out that this often has to do with different agencies' implementation of regulations and rules, and may not be a policy issue. Tom Calnan said adequate funding to allow for long-term monitoring is also a big issue. What about a recommendation coming out of this work group that one Federal Agency should be designated as a clearinghouse for coastal & wetland restoration projects? The rules should be fairly consistent but the current criteria are different depending upon the grant. Under the Ocean Action Plan there is a Federal working group. The RRCT could enumerate these issues and ask the Federal working group to address them.

There should also be consistency in reporting requirements for all of the Federal grants, and that there should be a more consistent data requirements for restoration databases. Kris Benson said there has been interagency coordination at the headquarters level in developing NERI that may be used to ease the way in getting grant funds out, reporting requirements. etc.

At some point, the RRCT needs to put all this together. There is a Federal working group meeting on March 22. The team could take action to write up what it would like to see brought forward to the Federal working group. Carl Ferraro said this would be premature. These first four meetings were intended to discuss these issues, but that it is still too early to forward recommendations based on these discussions. At some point the team will have to approach the Federal working group and the Alliance Management Team.

The team's most significant questions for this action concern what grants are available, how to apply for them, and why the reporting requirements are so different? The USFWS Coastal Program process is a very easy process compared to some of the other agencies like, for example, EPA's process, with its QA/QC requirements for monitoring plans, etc. The reporting process for CZM funding is also complex and time-consuming. Consistency regarding what will serve as match for federal funding is another issue to be addressed. Dr. Dokken said GMF-CRP grant reporting is also an issue. How much of this is really required by regulation or statute, and how much is it an interpretation? This issue needs to be talked about more.

R-1, item 7—Dr. Dokken and John Bowie are working to develop private sector support what the Alliance and the RRCT are doing--the Gulf of Mexico Foundation, the Nature Conservancy, etc. To capture that involvement—both money and their cooperation—

they want to get all of the vested interest groups involved. Oil and gas is easy, but coastal developers, cruise ships, marine shipping, and the ports are very difficult to engage. Dr. Dokken said the funding picture for restoration is changing dramatically. Private funding should supplement, not supplant current federal funding.

Item 8 will be dealt with this afternoon during the GRSMMP portion of the workshop.

Item 9: the team has been provided the population trends report. NOAA, through the Coastal Services Center, has put together a lot of NOAA data and attached it all to the report. The RRCT will need to look for any data gaps. If the team wants more information or for someone to come and talk about it, that can be provided. Contact point is Chris Ellis.

R-2---Heidi Recksiek said there is a lot of interest across the Federal community about community resilience. There is a lot of talk about economic downturns, algal blooms, hurricane effects, etc. Margaret Davidson has asked Ms. Recksiek to join the RRCT to bring focus to the R-2 actions. She said that USGS and NOAA are working on the data side of the community resilience issues. Remote sensing is a major element. The next level would be to create tools that can help restoration project managers in their efforts.

Action R2- 7 is about figuring out how to help communities be more resilient. There was talk about an index that would derive a score for a community, but it is hard to get one accurate number considering all the different facets of resilience. Now they are looking at a suite of indicators to help communities assess their situation. The NOAA CSC is looking at the variables that help a community assess its situation. They are talking to emergency management people, community planners, etc. They will be doing some pilot studies including one in the Mobile Bay area.

The question is: does the RRCT want to work on R-2 issues or does the current team want to hand these issues off to a separate team? If the RRCT wants to stay engaged with these actions, who else should be at the table? Are there needs that have been identified that the team should be pushing for, such as data gaps? Don Cahone from USGS is going to be putting on a workshop on that topic. Does the RRCT want to be the mechanism for building that base, or does the team want NOAA to approach state emergency management people and other potential team members? The RRCT needs to be sure that sea level scientists are heard. The RRCT could serve as a catalyst to get long-term funding commitments for monitoring and modeling etc. R-2 could be a separate group working on that. Dawn LaVoie said much of this work started long before the Governors' Action Plan was developed. There is a lot of science in R-2. Somehow, between NOAA and EPA, the R-2 was added to the action plan after Katrina. It is relevant to restoration in Louisiana and Texas.

After further discussion, it was felt that these issues are critically important to Louisiana and to all of the other Gulf States. The R2 actions are related to the hazards issue. The benefit of "keeping R-2 in the RRCT fold" is that habitat restoration aspects of resiliency will be considered as the data and tools are put together. The RRCT would need to add

the right people to the group. If NOAA and USGS are willing to fill in the gaps, Woody Woodrow can work on getting the right person in Texas to help. Texas does not have a problem with this being part of our charge even though it is a stretch to call community resilience a restoration issue. However, they are linked—the health of the ecosystem, health of the watershed, etc., come into play. Ms. Riecksick will follow up with the State Leads for the Restoration Team and talk about who works on these issues within the states. She will get with those points of contact and introduce them to the Alliance. Then the RRCT and this new sub-team could have a joint meeting, perhaps during the Florida round-robin meeting, and devote a half day to talk about those issues. If the RRCT can build a sub-team that will work on R-2 activities, they will be knowledgeable about the restoration issues that relate. Then it can be discussed about whether the RRCT wants to combine the groups or keep them separate and come together periodically. There could be some presentations about what data is available.

The overall Alliance meeting is scheduled for the second week in July. If you put R-2 discussions into that meeting, it will be more than a two-day meeting. The team needs an ad hoc committee to work on R-2. It would be an independent work group but it needs to be related to the restoration group. The two groups could meet for ½ day perhaps. Dr. Dokken said the wording in R2-7 would be better if the word “disaster” was changed to “extreme events” in land use planning.

There was a PHINS (Priority Habitat Information System) by Chris Cretini, USGS. All of the systems are on-line on the GOM Alliance website, and he invited everyone to take a look. The Habitat ID team is asking for feedback on the system. There is an on-line survey that can be completed to provide input at www.gomalliance.org.

Danny Hardin, University of Alabama-Huntsville, gave a presentation on the Gulf of Mexico Regional Collaborative. It is a partnership with NASA Marshall Space Flight Center, the University of Alabama in Huntsville, and Battelle/Pacific Northwest National Laboratory. Its goal is to provide US and Mexico governmental agencies with an integrated Earth observation system that supports a broader understanding of the Gulf of Mexico’s marine and coastal environments. Funding for the project comes from NASA. NASA has a tremendous amount of data available.

The remainder of the meeting was focused on the Gulf Regional Sediment Management Master Plan and was led by Larry Parsons, USACE. A copy of the notes from that meeting is available on the website. The URL for that website is: <http://www2.nos.noaa.gov/gomex/restoration/welcome.html>